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ABSTRACT

This document discusses community college governance. Because the challenges to governance are many, a solution to one problem could aggravate another and create new (and sometimes greater) difficulties for the college and those it serves. It would be better to have a full grasp of the problems before considering how they might all be solved. Advocates should strengthen community colleges by recognizing the increasing frequency of criticisms of governance and by advocating workable solutions. College governance fails when it does not ensure that the board focus on its primary responsibilities: protecting the college so it can serve the public interest; setting a clear and appropriate mission; checking college performance; and ensuring adequate support for the institution. Critics identify the following current problems in college governance: confusion over who is in charge; insufficient trustee education; boards that are out of touch; controlled boards; a conflict of interest; failure to assess the college's performance; lack of commitment by some; ethical failures; and failures in governance design. Suggested ways to improve governance of "the people's colleges" are: clarify responsibility; restructure boards if necessary; serve the public interest; encourage partnerships; require orientation for trustees; interact with students and employers; consult with other officials; establish and method of recall; and report on performance. (VWC)

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NEW EXPEDITIONS
Charting the Second Century of Community Colleges
a W. K. Kellogg Foundation Initiative

GOVERNANCE

Issues Paper No. 7

Issues in Community College Governance

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A B S T R A C T

This paper examines current criticisms of community college governance and suggests some ways it could be improved. Because the challenges to governance are many, a solution to one problem could aggravate another and create new (and sometimes greater) difficulties for the college and those it serves. It would be better to have a full grasp of the problems before considering how they might all be solved. Advocates could strengthen community colleges by recognizing the increasing frequency of criticisms of governance and by advocating workable solutions.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

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hose who govern a college direct, manage, or control the college's talent, energy, and resources. Colleges are governed internally, by administrators and faculty-staff committees, and externally, by local and state boards and sometimes by state legislatures, the courts, and Congress. Community college presidents work to link external and internal governance so that the college receives consistent direction.

In the minds of some critics, current community college governance suffers from poor design and poor execution. Because responsibility for governance is shared, no single person or group can be held accountable for making all the college's governance decisions. When they have no direct role in naming the trustees, those who fund the college find college accountability lacking. Many trustees

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do not understand that boards must decide the college's purposes in order to govern effectively. Others fail to grasp the fact that when boards try to manage the college's daily operations, they forfeit the opportunity to decide its mission. Unfortunately, some trustees refuse to commit adequate time and energy to their role. Lacking ethical commitment, a few have used trusteeship for personal gain or to pursue personal agendas. Instead of setting high-level policies for the college, boards too often are used as mere advisory boards for the president.

Systematic monitoring of board productivity would improve board performance. Were state and local college boards required to account collectively for their performance, they would press to clarify lines of accountability. More trustees would take advantage of training opportunities. If their product were regularly assessed, boards would be more inclined to streamline governance procedures, to move governance closer to those who understand citizens' needs, and to cooperate with other organizations that serve the same public interest.

The Governance Challenge

Many groups have a stake in the college. The nation, the state, and the community want the college to serve the public interest. The faculty wants the college to uphold the standards of the academic disciplines. Students want education at an affordable price, a convenient time, and a comfortable place. They also want to be recognized for what they learn.

One key to effective governance is political legitimacy. In order to be governed well, a college must be directed by those who have the right to govern. Traditionally, several major stakeholders have a legitimate role in the governance of American community colleges. By writing statutes, legislatures provide colleges with a legal framework. By representing those who use and support the college, trustees possess the right to govern. In turn, college presidents work to carry out directions of their board and other government authorities. Faculty and staff committees formulate internal policies that guide the programs of the college, and student government presides over issues of particular interest to students.

The distribution of governance responsibilities among several groups balances the different interests of diverse stakeholders. It also makes clear direction of the college difficult. When boards ask presidents to manage the college and faculty to direct its programs, they set in motion forces that routinely collide and conflict.

Governance problems would be easier to solve if the public were clamoring for a solution. Unfortunately, Americans seem increasingly disinterested in public life. In a recent election, only 10 percent of registered voters bothered to vote for community college trustees and school board members. When only a few of the eligible vote to select trustees, boards lack political legitimacy. A small special-interest group can easily elect its own members to the board and turn college governance upside down. When political control of a state shifts from one party to another, expectations of public colleges can shift rapidly. In states where trustees are appointed, the election of a governor from a different party can have dramatic impact on the board's composition and philosophy. The election or appointment of a single new trustee can mean an abrupt change in the institution's direction. New presidents bring new orientations to the college. The composition of faculty and staff committees also changes regularly. In addition, governance systems change regularly. Trustees come and go, and the systems of governance regularly evolve.

In addition, the design and membership of boards continually change. In one way, change is welcome because it allows colleges to refocus to meet new challenges. In another way, however, change makes governance difficult. Those who work for the college and those who study in it do not like to see the institution's mission change if that change means that a personal investment of time or career is threatened.

Diffusion of responsibility among several groups and continuous change are by no means the only factors that render the task of governance daunting. Simple human

frailty also contributes to the difficulty of governance. Despite their best intentions, those who govern are not always able to be as far-sighted, fair, consistent, prudent, and caring as they might like. Often, trustees and presidents face conflicts between their own values: loyalty conflicts with the value of truthfulness, fairness conflicts with mercy, and concern for the individual conflicts with concern for the community.

As a result, governance seldom involves "right or wrong" decisions. Often, the choice is between one kind of right and another. Those who govern never have enough time and money to solve all the college's problems smoothly. Because college resources are limited, trade-offs are a necessary part of governance. Trade-offs mean that for every good achieved in governance, some price has to be paid. For example, in order to answer the question of whom the college should serve, trustees must decide whom it cannot afford to serve. After the board decides how the college should improve the lives of its students, it must spend precious resources to see if expected results occur. When they do not, the board must either rebuild or eliminate programs. Such decisions are difficult because many people have invested personal time and effort in the failing programs. If the decision is to revamp the program, more resources are needed. When costs increase, so must price, even though higher prices bring a corresponding decrease in accessibility. Price increases can kill programs. These dilemmas show the intrinsic difficulty of governance. Because it is complicated and inherently difficult, governing will always be controversial.

Criticisms of Current Governance

In general, college governance fails when it does not ensure that the board focus on its primary responsibilities: protecting the college so it can serve the public interest, setting a clear and appropriate mission, checking college performance, and ensuring adequate support for the institution. Critics identify the following current problems in college governance.

Confusion over Who Is in Charge

At one time or another, kings, governors, politicians, community leaders, religious leaders, presidents, faculty, and students have all claimed the right to govern the people's colleges. Who ought to govern? Who has a right to define the college's mission? One theory maintains that those who are wise—the faculty—are those who should govern. Students, on the other hand, might prefer a free-market approach to governance in which student demands direct the college. Usually, however, the political authority of a state or nation retains the right to decide who governs its public colleges. In the United States, state laws typically call for elected or politically appointed boards to hire a president and to be responsible for the college's governance. Lay boards are to care for students and faculty, but they are to be primarily responsible to the larger society that funds the college and provides it with a legal charter.

During the 20th century, most boards have been willing to charge the president and faculty with responsibility for daily management of the college. Certain boards, however, have shown a desire to involve themselves in daily decision making from hiring to budgeting. When boards challenge convention by insisting on the right to make operational, day-to-day decisions, conflict usually results. Either the president or the faculty charges the board with micromanagement. Activist boards reject the accusation, however, arguing that the public expects them to be involved with what is going on at the college. When battles break out between boards and the colleges they govern, the public tends to react negatively to both sides of the dispute and to the college as well. Clearly, governance fails when its controversies generate ill will for the college it should be serving.

A different problem occurs when boards drift too far away from the colleges they govern. Inattentive boards do not micromanage, protect the college's integrity, or take responsibility for the college's mission. Fearing the charge of micromanagement, they succumb to the habit of what has been called rubber-stamping. The temptation to endorse every policy proposed at the college

is especially acute for trustees who have long and positive relationships with their chief executive officers. Gradually, however, such autopilot boards lose the public's confidence.

Another problem comes from conflict between state and local boards, or from conflict between college boards and state legislatures. When state authorities take on primary funding and/or governing responsibilities, the line that separates state level responsibilities from local board responsibilities sometimes blurs. In good times, ambiguity causes few problems. However, in lean years local boards often blame the state authority and state officials blame the local trustees. Once again, the battle produces no victor. Citizens care less about the finger-pointing than they care about the problem and the need for a speedy, effective solution. Sometimes disputes between local and state boards end up in the courts. There they are resolved, but not before public dollars are diverted from instruction, college patrons and employees are forced to endure months or years of uncertainty about who is in charge, and the public's patience is exhausted.

Unfortunately, confusion about who's in charge will only get worse with the growth of computer-based distance education. Suppose, for example, that a law degree is offered on the Internet. And suppose it is offered by a school based outside the state. Further suppose that large numbers of citizens living in a metropolitan area are not currently served by a law school and they want the local public community college to provide collateral support for their study at the Internet law school. Who is responsible for seeing that the support is provided? And who will be credited for the law school's graduates? The local community college board, the out-of-state school, or one or more state legislatures? Lines of accountability in these situations are far from clear.

Insufficient Trustee Education

Studies of community college boards indicate that many trustees understand the limits of their powers better than they understand the potential of their collective authority. Fearful of overstepping their bounds, many trustees default and delegate proper board responsibilities to the professionals at the college.

Unfortunately, too many community college boards spend most of their time listening to presidential reviews of events at the college and approving items brought to the board by the administration. Too seldom do some boards engage in systematic discussion of issues related to the college's mission. Who should the college be serving? How does the answer compare with the recent record of service? How well are students being prepared for the challenges that await them? What evidence is there that they and the public are being well served? Who could benefit from college services but do not use them? What would it take to extend the college's benefits to them? These are questions that ought to consume most of the board's time. Unfortunately, many boards spend more time on plans and reviews of recent activities than on assessment and mission issues.

Too few boards take seriously the tasks of organizing their own business and clarifying their own role and responsibilities. Many steadfastly refuse to draw a clear line between responsibilities of the board and responsibilities of the president. As a result, the presidents continue to use the board as an extension of themselves and deprive the board the opportunity to direct the college as it should.

The board ought to be pointing the college in strategically brilliant directions. In order to engage in effective planning, boards need to analyze internal and external trends and make projections. Because their colleges don't operate in a vacuum, boards should collaborate with other public entities that serve the same public. They should discuss common issues with high school boards, hospital boards, county boards, city councils, and chambers of commerce. They should share information on trends and strategic decisions.

Unfortunately, too many boards avoid talking with other boards about challenges. Instead, they isolate themselves and spend most of their time dealing with present problems or discussing problems of the past. When boards restrict their deliberations to past or present problems, they are giving up

an opportunity to shape the future. When they avoid conversations with other community leaders and officials, they sacrifice the opportunity to learn and develop wider support for the college's mission.

Trustees fail to understand their own, central governing responsibilities when they are not properly oriented to the role of the board. Unfortunately, some states do not have organizations that serve the educational needs of trustees. In states that do have such associations, some boards refuse to take advantage of the association's educational services. Few legislatures have passed laws that require trustees to sharpen their board skills. Unfortunately, many trustees do not demand a thorough orientation when they join the board. Presidents and board chairs sometimes disagree over who is responsible for new board member orientation.

Consequently, many trustees do not receive an adequate initial orientation to the role of the board or a clear explanation of how board members are expected to continue to learn the skills of trusteeship. As a result, too many boards continue to serve as a sounding board for the president rather than as the designers of policies that guide and guard the college.

Boards That Are out of Touch

When trustees fail to organize themselves to address the basic challenges facing the college, the board can easily lose contact with the community. Moreover, many college boards do not communicate regularly with key community groups. Although some boards listen regularly to what representative groups feel the college should be doing for citizens, many boards have no reliable mechanism for developing an understanding of the community's needs. The "public comment" section of a board's agenda seldom produces meaningful suggestions for a board. If trustees are to have useful discussions about the community's needs, a better method for tapping internal (staff) and external (public) opinion must be found.

Unfortunately, boards sometimes lose touch with external constituencies. When trustees show little or no interest in the needs of the public, governance fails. In order to determine what public interest the college should serve, trustees must become students of social change. Their boards must find reliable ways of communicating with those who use the college either as students or as those who use the talents of graduates. Boards must also stay in touch with the prevailing political currents. When trustees fail to grasp the needs of students, the requirements of employers, or the politics of social change, governance breaks down and respect for trustees erodes.

Boards must also stay in touch with the college staff's values and aspirations. Some trustees fail to understand the peculiar nature of academic culture. Colleges are characterized by collective bargaining and tenure, two institutions sometimes missing from the trustee's own workplace and which have a good and bad effect on the colleges. Tenure works to protect academic freedom, and collective bargaining gives faculty a role in determining their own compensation. However, tenure and collective bargaining can create the (perhaps faulty) impression that faculty are a pampered class. Unhappy with tenure and collective bargaining, some trustees condemn both traditions outright.

Academic culture is different, but the fact that it is different does not make it dysfunctional. The effort of trustees to appreciate the nuances of academic culture often spells the difference between a successful and unsuccessful board. Even when academic culture's traditions are rejected by the board, the rejection should come with understanding and some humility and concern. However, when boards refuse to show such understanding and concern, they demonstrate that they are out of touch with the institution's internal culture. Governance then breaks down as those who need direction from the board reject it on the grounds that the board does not appreciate the college's values.

Controlled Boards: A Conflict of Interest

Failure to understand the community and the college culture is not always the college's main governance problem. Boards can force colleges to serve a single master rather than the public interest. Such boards can insist that all decisions be subject to the approval of a given political party or organization.

At a few colleges, trustees have been elected or appointed to boards primarily to protect the faculty's interest in tenure, shared governance and faculty wages, hours, and working conditions. Clearly, the public needs good faculty. But the public interest can never be reduced to the interests of those who work at the college. When a faculty union or any other single interest controls the board, the public loses. The college was created to serve the people of the district, not to serve itself or its own employees. Citizens soon lose confidence in a college board that has more concern for a special constituency than it has for the public welfare.

The inclusion of student and faculty representatives on boards can also create conflicts of interest. Can a student trustee be primarily loyal to student government and to the board of trustees as well? Can a faculty member trustee be loyal to his or her bargaining group and the board? When the board is obligated to serve the public interest, and, by definition, student and faculty trustees are appointed to represent only their own groups, a conflict of interest seems to be unavoidable. Rather than putting students and faculty members on college boards, legislatures would be better advised to insist that boards seek faculty and student input before making key policy decisions. Boards need input; they don't need conflicts of interest.

Failure to Assess the College's Performance

Traditionally, boards have been pleased when enrollments go up and budgets balance. Increasingly, however, the public demands evidence that the college is improving the lives of students. In order to assess the college's contribution to students, trustees must understand the needs of today's remarkably diverse student body. If trustees do not know what students need, they will be hard-pressed to judge whether the college is meeting those needs.

Understanding the needs of today's students is especially difficult for state board members who are separated from students by several layers of bureaucracy, and whose concept of students is based on their personal experiences. Some board members struggle to understand so-called "remedial students." Many do not realize that the inability to graph a mathematical function or to use the concept of standard deviation is enough to place students in the remedial category. Some do not realize how many community college students live paycheck-to-paycheck and how they tend to make enrollment decisions at the last moment. Many do not understand the multiple priorities of working students with children. Others fail to understand that many students need only a course or two, or that many students cannot afford to buy the textbook for their course until weeks of the semester have passed.

Administrators often package enrollment information as though it could speak for itself. For example, boards are told at the beginning of the semester that headcount and credit hour enrollment is either up or down. But trustees need other information about students. They need to know why students enroll, what obstacles they face, what they expect from the college, and evidence that the students are getting what they seek.

As long as trustees lack good information about the needs of faculty, staff, students, and the community's expectations, they are not prepared to govern effectively. Somehow, colleges must find ways to monitor expectations of the college. This requires new and effective techniques for the adequate education of all trustees, something that is not happening now on many boards. Trustee education, of course, requires a serious commitment from the board members because one learns without investing time and effort.

Lack of Commitment by Some

Discharging the duties of a trustee competently consumes a great deal of time, energy, and acquired skill. How committed are most board members to their governance role?

Americans today are working more hours and their lives are increasingly complex. Limits of time and energy put great pressure on the volunteer trustees' ability to discharge duties effectively. Instead of regrouping and figuring out a method to permit the board to focus on issues of para-

mount importance, some boards simply go with the flow, trusting the mountains of reports they receive from college presidents until the president makes a fatal mistake. Then the solution is simple. Fire the president and begin all over again.

Surveys indicate that some trustees spend little time on board work outside of board meetings. After all, there is no penalty assessed against board members who arrive late or unprepared for the board meeting. College presidents occasionally struggle to get a quorum at local board meetings. Some board members appear to ignore communications that arrive between regularly scheduled meetings. Attendance at state and national trustee meetings often represents about one of every five trustees. Even worse, some trustees blame their failure to participate in educational programming on the public's tendency to fault boards for spending money on themselves.

When trustees fail to show commitment to their role, some wonder whether board members are as dedicated as their predecessors. It is possible that in the infancy of community colleges, some community leaders were attracted to board service for less than noble reasons. Although it is true that some early board members merely wanted to shape the basic character and traditions of an institution that would serve the community for years, others wanted to plan campuses, award contracts, and name building names after themselves or their friends. Today, there are few contracts to award and fewer buildings to name. The direction of most of the college's educational programs was set years ago and only has to be fine-tuned. The legal and social environment is much more complex than it was 30 years ago. Boards feel pressure from a variety of special interest groups, and there is little general respect for authority. In addition, lawsuits threaten all public servants in unprecedented ways.

Because different groups have different and sometimes incompatible expectations of the college, boards of trustees find themselves unable to meet all the competing demands. Some groups clamor for open admissions, whereas others want higher, more rigorous standards. Some want a common curriculum and others call for diversity and reject the notion of a single intellectual tradition to which all students should be exposed. Frequently, the frustration of interest groups spills over into torrents of anger and the boards receive the brunt of the hostility. Many trustees wonder whether the (often unpaid) position is worth the trouble it causes. For many today, the risks of board service simply seem to outweigh the rewards. As a result, community leaders with wealth and influence have fewer reasons to seek the board. A common perception is that this disinterest on the part of "movers and shakers" leaves boards to less powerful citizens who may seek membership as a lark or as a means to fame and fortune. Surveys of trustees reveal that some see the community college board as a stepping stone to higher office. Others seek trusteeship because of the recognition and limited influence that the office provides. Some seek to join the board in order to even a score or to challenge the establishment. Recent American history has fanned fires of cynicism and many have decided the purpose of boards is to catch government officials doing something wrong. For them, an inquisitor's mentality has taken hold. They reject the traditional notion that governance depends on a bond of trust between the board and those who administer the college.

Citizens are more skeptical, and perhaps more cynical, than their parents, and for that reason it may never again be possible for trustees to bring to their boards a generally-accepted reputation for community leadership.

Ethical Failures

Unfortunately, the record shows that some individuals seek appointment or election to the board in order to gain personal advantage. The temptation to use public office to enrich oneself or one's friends and family is as old as public office itself. No one should believe that self-dealing is a creation of recent history. The fact that unethical behavior is common does not make it acceptable.

When the public perceives that a trustee is benefiting from a conflict of interest, governance and the college suffer. This is not to say that conflicts are easy to detect

or guard against. In sparsely populated districts, trustees struggle constantly to avoid conflicts of interest. Sometimes a board member is related or socially connected with the only qualified builder, plumber, banker, or Spanish teacher in the district. Even in larger districts, trustees sometimes battle to divorce their personal interests from the interests of the college. Because self-preservation comes naturally to all humans, setting aside self-interest is difficult indeed.

Many current board controversies stem from one or more perceived conflicts of interest. Few boards have a reliable mechanism for early detection of conflicts of interest. Fewer still have adopted a method for deciding conflict of interest issues. Although some boards have adopted codes of behavior that warn against creating the perception of self-dealing, the problem often remains because the person with the conflict is usually one of the last to detect it. Ethical conflicts will continue until boards adopt systematic measures to alert their members of ethical compromises in the making. Boards also need help exploring leadership and core values. Many trustees have never had an opportunity to explore ethical dilemmas and the techniques of ethical decision making.

Failures in Governance Design

Some critics argue that the problem of current governance stems not so much from the trustees' lack of commitment, preparation, and understanding but rather from flaws in the governance system. Even when trustees understand their role and try to fulfill it, they say governance is cumbersome and unnecessarily time consuming. One California study found that 22 different agencies and offices had a share in community college governance. With so many players on the stage at once, it is not surprising that the pace is slow and that the actors sometimes bump into the furniture.

If you want to have some fun, says a seasoned faculty member, try tracking a simple proposal for change at the college. Even the most innocuous initiatives take an agonizingly long time to wend their way through the labyrinth of faculty and board committees. In an age where successful organizations deliver just in time and rely on overnight delivery, traditionally governed colleges operate at a severe disadvantage. Enrollment statistics seem to indicate that more nimble competitors are succeeding in taking advantage of community colleges' relatively slow forms of governance.

Much of college governance is handled by committee. Faculty and committees have proliferated in many colleges during the last 20 years. Because the membership and structure of committees changes constantly, the committee that makes a decision is never around to take responsibility for its failures. Those outside higher education who are accustomed to more streamlined forms of governance wonder whether committee-based governance permits individuals to avoid responsibility for their decisions. Many now ask whether part-time, lay trustees can ever possess the knowledge, skills, and intuition to govern wisely and well. They wonder whether a traditionally governed college can be accountable to the people who support it.

When colleges lack accountability—a process for holding persons responsible for their actions—they fail to earn the confidence of lawmakers who will decide their legal roles and future budgets. By contrast, when a decision by a proprietary school owner turns out to be wrong, it is the owner of the school who pays the price. Because they can be sure of who is accountable for propriety colleges' successes and failures, legislators are showing an increasing confidence in privately held schools. Because they have a vested interest in their institutions, proprietary school owners remain engaged in their schools' performance, even when their role is restricted to high-level policy making. The same cannot always be said of public college trustees.

A system of governance contributes to a college's accountability when it encourages rapid and prudent direction of the institution. When its complexity bogs down the college or causes trustees to lose interest, the system should be reformed.

How Community College Governance Can Be Improved

Any successful attempt to improve college governance must address the problems cited

above. What can be done to improve governance of "the people's colleges"?

Clarify Responsibility

Lines of accountability must be clarified so that everyone knows who is responsible for what. Who is responsible for deciding the college's basic direction? Who decides its curriculum development? Is adequate funding for the college ultimately a local board responsibility or does it rest with the state board? Who is in charge of hiring and firing of college employees? Who is in charge of the daily operations of the college? In order to be successful, reforms must ensure that these questions are settled and the settlement clearly communicated so there can be no doubt about who is in charge. Here the public and its guardian, the press, have a role to play. The public must demand clear answers to the question, "Who is in charge?"

Restructure Boards if Necessary

Governance systems must be restructured to ensure that boards have an opportunity to balance the inevitable conflicting demands that will be made on the college. Citizens must be confident that the colleges are serving the public interest rather than the special interest of one or two pressure groups. In order to ensure that the board acts in the public's interest, its performance should be reviewed regularly by an objective party. If college accreditation were withheld whenever boards defaulted on their basic responsibilities to the public, trustees would not permit college governance to be captured by a favorite few. The risk of a sell-out would be too high. To ensure that boards are kept from defaulting on their basic responsibilities, community college associations should call on regional accrediting agencies to examine college governance and to deny full accreditation to any college that is being governed by a dysfunctional board.

Serve the Public Interest

The twin tasks of governing and funding should be assigned to the board that can best determine what is in the public interest. Often, this is the board that is closest to the people who are served by the college. In most states this would be the local board, although in some small states a statewide board can effectively monitor public demand for college services and effectively carry out the job of governing. In larger, more complex states and provinces, the state board should be restricted to a coordinating role.

Encourage Partnerships

Boards should be encouraged to take on partners in their task. When boards call upon state legislatures for financial support for the colleges they govern, the board has an opportunity and a duty to hear the legislators' opinions about the colleges and the boards that govern them. Such exchanges broaden boards and give trustees a clearer idea of what the public wants the colleges to accomplish. Similarly, when boards delegate governance responsibilities to the president and the faculty and staff, they open themselves to input from others who may have a very clear idea of what services the public demands of the college. Advocates should seek funding for partnerships. Collaboration happens when it brings rewards. If funding opportunities can result from partnerships, boards will learn how to work with others.

Require Orientation for Trustees

States should require trustees of all public colleges to undergo initial orientation to their responsibilities and regular training as well. Boards should have an opportunity to choose who will provide their training. However, a decision not to train should not be an option as it is now. Increasingly, professionals in America must show that their skills have been honed through continuing education. Judges, physicians, airline pilots, realtors, and funeral directors all take advantage of regular training. If full-time professionals must train in order to serve, so should trustees. Training in ethics should be part of the regimen for all board members.

Interact with Students and Employers

Governance systems should require that boards consult regularly with representatives of student and employee groups. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, however, they should not put student or faculty representatives on the board.

Consult with Other Officials

Governance systems should require that boards consult regularly with other educational boards and officials who serve the same citizenry. In addition, boards should be required to consult regularly with representatives of those who employ the college's students. Only through such consultation can boards make informed judgments about the college's productivity.

Establish a Method of Recall

Some provision for recall of irresponsible trustees should be implemented in every state. The records of elected and appointed trustees show that no single method of selecting a public official is foolproof. Some remedy ought to be available when the trustee regularly flouts his or her responsibility to the public. By themselves, neither the appointment process nor elections can guarantee first-rate trusteeship. Bad trustees have been produced by both methods. A method for the recall of irresponsible trustees would, however, put everyone on notice that all board members will be held to a high standard. In order to work well, the method of recall must also protect good trustees from capricious attacks by those who are angered by reasonable board decisions.

Report on Performance

Boards should be required to report regularly to the public and to the state legislature on their own performance and the performance of their colleges. Such reports should be brief and substantial. The light of public attention will provide an incentive for all trustees to see that their boards have something to say for themselves when they are called to account. College performance accounts should make clear who has benefited from college services, how they have benefited, and what the benefit cost the college and its beneficiaries.

Conclusion

Although advocates of governing boards might be tempted to dismiss criticisms of governance as the sour grapes of the disaffected, college defenders would be wise to assume that the critiques are offered in good faith and that there is some truth in them. Many of the critics of current governance have strong records of service to American higher education. Their arguments deserve to be taken seriously. Ironically, in one way the criticisms of governance constitute a compliment to board members. The criticisms would not be offered if governance were irrelevant. The critiques affirm the vital role that trustees and their boards can play.

By implementing the reforms suggested in this paper, states could ensure public confidence in the boards that govern their community colleges. Nothing will be more difficult to accomplish, yet nothing could contribute more to the welfare of the colleges.

A Note to the Reader

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author alone. Nothing in the paper should be considered to be the position of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association or its members. The author assumes responsibility for all errors and omissions. The author freely offers credit for any valuable insights to those who have counseled him during the course of his work with college boards.

Over the years, community colleges have improved because their leaders have been willing to admit and address shortcomings. Although this paper presents a critical analysis of current problems in community college governance, the author continues to have a high level of confidence in community college boards and the institutions that they govern. The analysis is offered in the hope that it will lead to even better governance than that which has produced the best college system in the world.

AACC

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